



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
2CC Breakfast with Mark Parton
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E&OE

Subjects: Cyclone Yasi, Egypt, anti-RSPT campaign, PM's CEDA speech.

PARTON: We've got Federal Trade Minister, Craig Emerson, on the line right now this morning for his regular Wednesday morning spot. G'day Craig.

EMERSON: Good morning, Parto.

PARTON: The world is looking at Queensland this morning as, of course, we wait for Cyclone Yasi, which is now a category five. Your expectations for the next 24 hours?

EMERSON: Well, I'm no weather forecaster, but the weather forecasters themselves say it's a monster cyclone, so they're really battening down the hatches in Far-North Queensland. We've had a fairly bad run, obviously.

PARTON: Oh, shocker!

EMERSON: And now this. I know – talking to people who were associated or were there with Cyclone Tracy back in 1975 – and steel poles were bent over during that, so pretty stiff winds there, Parto. But Queensland people, as you know, are pretty resilient. They've been literally battening down the hatches. Lots have been leaving. They have been evacuating the nursing homes and other aged care facilities, so everyone will just do their best.

PARTON: Craig, we've got a pretty interesting situation unfolding in Egypt at the moment. The Egyptian president has spoken in the last half an hour or so and suggested that he's not standing down, that he's going to stay in

place until September, and God knows where this is going to end up. What's the extent of our trade relationship with Egypt?

EMERSON: They are about 33rd, so it's not a key trading relationship at the moment, but obviously we're always keen to invest in improving our market access into countries. The more immediate problem is this need for a peaceful transition, Parto. I think they're trying to get a million people in the streets and going pretty well about that. The military doesn't seem to be too concerned about the people – which is good in this sense! At least that minimises the prospect of violence. And similarly with the police. I think all we can do, really, is hope for a peaceful transition.

PARTON: Turning our attention to some other news this morning – how much does it cost to bring down a Prime Minister? And the answer is a tad over \$22 million. Did it surprise you that that is how much the mining industry spent in the six weeks on its campaign against Kevin Rudd's plan for a Resource Super Profits Tax?

EMERSON: Not at all. If you watched the television, which I'm sure you did, the ads were pretty well wall-to-wall. That campaign was, as you say, very well funded. I think we really need to put that behind us now. I mean, you can get into the mood of saying "oh those buggers", you know. We've just got to do what's right for the nation, and the mining industry is very important for our nation's prosperity, so let's work together as best we can, for the better of the country.

PARTON: And, finally, your esteemed leader has certainly been talking the talk in the last 24 hours. It was a pretty amazing speech to the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia in Melbourne yesterday, flagging some new incentives to encourage two million Australians, including disability pensioners and part-time employees, to work more hours as part of a dramatic bid to ease workforce shortages. I found that pretty interesting. But also outlining some ground-breaking economic reforms. This will be the year that defines Julia Gillard as Prime Minister, one way or the other, won't it?

EMERSON: I think she's shaping up in the Hawke reforming mould, and I think that's incredibly encouraging. She's not only talking the talk of economic reform – she made two speeches late last year about the need for it – and now, quite deliberately, Julia is starting to lay out an economic reform program. And getting people who want to work into work is very important. We're facing, with the mining boom, Parto, not only skills shortages, but shortages of labour all round. If there are disincentives for people doing more work, or entering the workforce in the first place, we ought to be doing what we can to remove those barriers, because that makes sure that everyone in Australia has got the opportunity and the dignity of work. I'm really encouraged. I think it's terrific.

PARTON: Craig, thanks for your time this morning, always appreciated.